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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7677  
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6339  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
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RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 8040  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 8322  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000998

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DEPARTMENT FOR OPS, P (WEST), SCA (BOUCHER)  
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SUBJECT: BHARAT BALLOT 09: JAI HO! CONGRESS PARTY WINS  
DECISIVE VICTORY

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter Burleigh for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (U) Please note that the numbers in this cable are all approximate, based on the latest media reports of vote count in progress. The actual results may vary slightly but we do not expect any major changes. The Election Commission will certify the final results on Monday, May 18.

¶2. (C) Summary: The ruling Congress Party decisively prevailed in the 2009 national elections winning a shockingly high 201 parliamentary seats. This election result is the best outcome for U.S.-India relations that we could have anticipated. While the 201 seats fall below the 272 needed to form a majority in the 543 seat lower house, the Congress Party should easily be able to form a stronger, more stable coalition without the help of the Communist Party-led Left Front. The Left Front was thrashed in its West Bengal stronghold winning only 20 seats versus 58 in 2004. The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fared relatively poorly winning only 123 seats. Ultimately, the BJP never seized on a big issue during the campaign. Instead the party preferred to make the fight a personality contest between L.K. Advani and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The Congress Party gladly accepted, presenting Singh as the sober economist and Advani as the radical Hindu nationalist. Additionally, the Congress Party's decision not to align with partners pre-poll paid rich dividends in states such as Uttar Pradesh, where the Congress Party more than doubled its seats from 2004. The horse-trading now begins between the Congress Party and its allies as Ministerial posts are assigned. It will likely take a week if not more to finalize the talks. The new government must be in place by June 2. End Summary.

Clear Mandate for Congress Party

¶3. (U) The Congress Party performed well beyond all expectations winning 201 seats, an increase of 56 seats from its 2004 tally. Even the party's internal polling going into the final weekend only showed a range of 160-180 seats. While Congress Party leaders will spend the next several days building the government, Manmohan Singh will likely remain unchallenged as Prime Minister. Both Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi repeatedly endorsed Singh as the Prime Minister during

the campaign and Sonia has done so again this afternoon. The BJP's attacks on the Singh as the lapdog of Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi failed to resonate.

¶4. Home Minister Chidambaram remains locked in a tight race that media report has gone to a recount. Congress Party candidate and former UN official Shashi Tharoor won his contest in Kerala. The one notable loss for the Congress Party was Women and Child Development Minister Renuka Chowdhary.

#### BJP Loses Ground

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¶5. (U) The BJP finished with 123 seats, down 15 from 2004. Throughout the campaign the BJP failed to gain traction against the Congress Party on any significant issue. The party lurched from issue to issue without a consistent strategy other than calling the Prime Minister "weak." The loss virtually ends the leadership of L.K. Advani and will set off a power struggle within the party as it now faces a generational change at the top.

#### Left Parties Get Thrashed

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¶6. (U) Voters decimated the anti-U.S. Left Front, an amalgam of left wing parties led by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM). In 2004 the combine formed the third largest block with 58 seats, mostly from West Bengal. After

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the 2004 elections, outside support from the Left Front enabled the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) to govern, until it withdrew support over the Indo-U.S. Civil Nuclear Initiative in July 2008. In this election the Left Front won only 20 seats, mainly losing to the Congress Party's new West Bengal ally, All India Trinamool Congress (AITC).

#### Congress Party to Form the Government

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¶7. (U) As soon as the Election Commission certifies the results, President Patil will invite the Congress Party to form the government. No doubt, negotiations have already begun between the Congress Party leadership and its allies for ministerial berths. Regional party leaders such as Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party (21 seats) and Mamata Bannerjee of the AITC (19 seats) will jockey for positions in the new government. Discussions are likely to take a week or longer before the government is finalized. However, with its impressive showing, the Congress Party will be negotiating from a position of strength. The government must be in place by June 2. There is likely to be some change at high profile ministries as Home Minister Chidambaram may lose his seat and the Finance Ministry is currently vacant.

#### Positive Effect for U.S.-India Relations

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¶8. (C) Comment: The overwhelming victory for the Congress Party represents the best result the U.S. could have anticipated. With approximately 200 seats, the victory is a clear mandate for the leadership of Manmoham Singh and Sonia Gandhi, which has been very friendly towards the U.S. And now that it appears the shorn Left Front parties will not be in the coalition, those with the most virulent anti-U.S. attitude in India will no longer hold a veto over Indian government policy.

¶9. (U) We will continue to report on potential developments, including when it would be appropriate for the President to send congratulations to Prime Minister Singh. End Comment.  
BURLEIGH